

WHIPPERSNAPPERS

On raw days Cherry stands at the back door and watches his tailored wife care for her plant while I look out the front where Arnie in an old football jersey washes his car.

It is between rounds. Still back to back like injured parties, we wish for more money, bigger biceps or breasts, a dinner to go to, one clean glass, children and other ceremonies.

Then somebody breaks something else and nobody cleans that up, either. I go out and stay out. Or she does.

Sometimes Cherry naps and I sit in the sun on my sleepy, dune colored Dodge and nurse Schlitz while Arnie buffs his red Ford that has a hole in the hood so the engine can stick out.

Arnie has told me some amazing things. Last month: he made a list of friends and stopped at 500. Last week: he has never argued with Joyce, never cheated on her, never will. Today: thirteen months from now he will get his Master's and settle down: Gregory & Son.

He looks at the foothills, the reverent sponge hesitates. I can see the future in his eyes and it is arranged like the furniture in his spotless house.

Indoors I look through the rubble for Cherry. When I wake her she says, "Anything wrong?" And I answer, "No. Move over."

SPRING

Ten years ago when I came to Pasadena, I found a place to live that suited my fancy. It was big and hard to heat and cheap: just the place for a poet. Also it had a new landlady who carried her cigarettes deep in her bra and gave me Oedipus eyes.

All of us who lived there were ghosts in the sun: Carroll with a queen-sized bed in a vassal-sized room; Maria upstairs who did nothing but wash for Chi downstairs who never went out: Joe a Jack Spratt and his wife who would not go to Mohammed.

Almost the only time we saw one another was around the first of the month when we would gather to ask June to wait a little for the rent. Again. And she would give us all Frescas and tell stories about booze in her douche bag and an AA lover who was such a man that when he made love, her naturally curly hair rolled straight out like a New Year's favor.

Usually we lived inside ourselves like blood but as June talked and smoked and made us laugh, life unfolded like a map and we made plans to get together for dinner and throw lavish parties.

Then Chi moved out taking Maria and her heavy duty cleansers and a stereo moved in next door and started beer fights in the hall with a collection of neckties who had a Whirl-O-Touch album organizer.

Then June's boyfriend turned out to be a married stiff and she met a man from Chicago, sold the house just like that and flew East forever.

People turned themselves over like new leaves and I moved from apt. to apt., a nomad on a chain, looking for a little less noise, wearing the place like a rabbit's foot.

For years now I have been the only original tenant, living alone in the garage apartment, as unapproachable as Billy Goat Gruff, constantly offended by the mileage lore of Volkswagons and the sight of Frisbees against the evening sky.

So I move on to God knows where saying goodbye only to June to whom my fancy, no longer young, turns at all seasons.

-- Ronald Koertge

Pasadena CA

WHEN THE RED DOG CAME

he laid his head in my mother's lap
& their hair was just the same
& I felt afraid.

"I am the Red Knight & you
are the Red Knight's lady."
"I know."